Political and Social Rank

By EDWARD W. TOWNSEND.

A LEGISLATIVE body which has been in session regularly for a century and a third, as has been our Congress, aside from its formal rules accumulates precedents which have almost the force of rules adopted by resolution and printed in a book. That can be illustrated by an unimportant incident which occurred in the House one day over which members afterward laughted, but in itself it presented a puzzle in mental phenomena which members afterward discussed with serious interest.

Understanding of the drama will be aided by a rough sketch of the stage setting: The House was in Committee of the Whole, a parliamentary status so nearly like a session of the House that during committee sessions many gallery visitors suppose that they are witnessing a regular session.

A rule of the House requires that certain classes of bills, chiefly tax and appropriation bills, shall have consideration by the Committee of the Whole. After a motion has been adopted to go into such a committee the Speaker designates a member to preside as chairman, and then for hours the proceedings appear to be a session of the House, except that there is no vote by ayes and nays and that a chairman instead of the Speaker presides. There is one other difference which distinctly relates to stage setting. As the Speaker descends the steps of the rostrum an assistant sergeant-at-arms lifts the mace from its pedestal and stands it on the floor by the side of a chair he occupies at the foot of the rostrum steps. Messages from the President of the United States and from the Senate can be received only by the House in session, and these messages are sent at the convenience of the senders, not of the addressee—the House. Therefore, while the House is in Committee of the Whole it frequently happens that a messenger, say from the White House, appears at the north door of the chamber opposite the Speaker's desk. As he does so an official touches an electric push button which notifies the Speaker; the doorkeeper advances up the center aisle and stands by the messenger's side; the chairman announces, "The committee will rise to permit the House to receive a message from the President." The Speaker enters the chamber and as the chairman descends the steps from the rostrum the Speaker ascends and stands at his desk as the assistant sergeant-at-arms replaces the mace on its pedestal. The doorkeeper then announces, "Mr. Speaker, a message from the President of the United States."

The messenger says, "Mr. Speaker."

The Speaker says, "Mr. Secretary."

Then the messenger drones his message, that the President has signed bills number so and so, and so and so—or whatever he may have to communicate, bows and departs.

Now all this is a routine with which the members are familiar, in which they have no interest, which gives them a few minutes in which to look over newspapers or letters, or to gossip; a welcome breathing spell interjected, perhaps, into a warm debate. The whole formality goes through, one supposes, without thought of or notice by members; but one day the assistant sergeant-at-arms, his mind engulfed in a sport news page, neglected to raise the mace, the outward and visible sign that the Speaker presides, the House is in session.

Suddenly there arose from a dozen parts of the chamber startled whispers, "The mace! The mace!" Then from every part of the floor the cry rose, and in it one could detect the accent of alarm: "The mace! The mace is not up!"

Now, observe; those men, the score, the hundred, who joined in that cry were not interested in the formality — were, one might think, unconscious of it; they were gossiping, reading, whatnot, but a sudden uneasy consciousness that the mace, a two thousand year old symbol of legislative authority, little changed in form since the time of the Cæsars, was neglected, was not in its appointed place. The assistant sergeant-at-arms, crimson of face, lost all interest in batting averages and hastily raised the mace to its proper place of eminence; members sighed with relief and then laughed nervously.

Why had the absence of the mace been noted? Why had its absence created uneasiness, alarm? I talked over the incident with Champ Clark, the then Speaker. "That respect for the authority which the mace symbolizes is in the blood of our races," he said. "During my many years here I recall only two occasions when a Speaker, to obtain order, has resorted to the mace. Once it looked as if passions on more than one part of the floor would end in violence; another time two members were on the verge of blows. The Speaker ordered the sergeant-at-arms to 'enforce order.' The sergeant-at-arms, holding the mace before him, approached the raging belligerents, saying: 'Members will be seated. It is the order of the Speaker. Members will be in order and take their seats!' And those fighting mad members melted into their seats as if they were mischievous school children who saw a husky man teacher approach, ruler in hand. I believe that those members who to-day called for the mace *felt* it was not up. That's all I can make out of it," the Speaker concluded.

Countess von Bernstorff.

Mme. Chang.

The only reference to the mace I've ever noticed in the Rules is in a section of Rule IV., which reads: "The symbol of his (the sergeant-at-arms) office shall be the mace, which shall be borne by him while enforcing order on the floor."

The mace of the House is the conventional bundle of sticks, signifying strength in union, carved ebony, I think, surmounted by a silver globe and that by the American eagle. When it is not in the chamber it is locked in a safe.

That story may serve to put readers in a more tolerant frame of mind when they read of delays in House proceedings caused by members' demand that precedents be preserved. I have seen veteran members take that side in a dispute on a point of parliamentary law which they believed upheld the precedent rulings and without any interest in the matter which would be helped or hindered by the ruling. As an example of how the interpretation of a rule has been finally settled by decision of various Speakers, it is interesting to note that rule governing roll calls—a matter of much importance to members—has, since the first form of the rule was adopted in 1789, been ruled upon eighty-five times, and the rule itself takes only sixty-four lines in the "House Manual." It is the decisions of generations of Speakers interpreting a rule rather than its own text which protect the rights of members. It is frequently said that one can find a precedent to warrant any contention about any rule. That would be interesting if true. The truth is that with a few exceptions the precedents governing the ruling on any point of order are along the lines of the basic rule governing all parliamentary law. That is, rules are made to expedite business in an orderly manner and to protect the rights of the minority. Without rules and observance of them the business of legislation would be delayed, would be disorderly, and minorities would have nothing potent to appeal to to preserve their rights.

If that seems much to say about a matter not of general interest, the reply might be that it should be of great general interest, for—venturing to generalize—only those are of influence in the transaction of business in either house of Congress who understand the rules. Further, only those of long service can understand the rules and their applications. The result is that a knowledge of the rules confers upon a member more power than eloquence, wealth, high social position or endearing personal attractions. The South has fewer members than the North, yet it has a greater number of able parliamentarians, because the South more commonly than the North reelects its Representatives and Senators.

A history of every conspicuous parliamentarian in the House would disclose that only one, Crisp of Georgia, is comparatively young in service; but Mr. Crisp is the son of a former Speaker, and before he became a member he was parliamentary clerk to a Speaker. In the Senate the noted parliamentarians are all graduates of the House—as Senator Lenroot, Republican, and Senator Underwood, Democrat—where they were also notable parliamentarians. If I have preached a little political sermon I need not call attention to its lesson: it must be obvious.

When I entered the House its control had been turned over to the Democrats, and the work of assigning committeeships to majority members was done by a Committee on Committees. I was fortunate in my assignment because of a curious reason: It did not occur to me to ask for any assignments, although many urgent appeals were made, and when it was discovered that I had made no request my reticence was rewarded by assignments to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Committee on the Library; the ones I most desired. All chairmanships were, as usual when a change in majority occurs, given to ranking committee members except in the instance of the Committee on Military Affairs, of which Representative William Sulzer of New York was the ranking Democratic member; but for reasons sufficient for the gentleman who made the assignments he was made chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Mr. Sulzer's fellow committeemen were not in sympathy with him, and it was a relief to them when he left the House to become a candidate for Governor of New York. He was elected, but was removed from the Governorship by impeachment.

Members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs have maintained for a century and more social relations with the members of the Diplomatic Corps. Ambassadors and Ministers call or leave cards at the residences of committee members, who respond with the same social gesture, and then follows an exchange of entertainments, dinners usually. One of our committee made the suggestion that as several of us lived in apartments more or less restricted in space we should all meet our social obligations by a committee dinner, having the Diplomatic Corps and the ladies of their families as our guests. The plan worked out well; the beautiful building of the Pan American Union was placed at our disposal, a caterer furnished, who served dinner in the assembly room, one of the finest rooms, by the way, in Washington; the orchestra of the Marine Band played for after dinner dancing, and the affair was voted as great a success as it was a novelty. Among the guests at our first dinner was Secretary of State Philander Knox and Mrs. Knox, and their presence added distinction to the affair.

The following year we put out some discreet feelers to learn if our dinner reception had been in truth enjoyed by our guests as much as their politeness had prompted them to assure us it was, and we were gratified to learn that such was the fact; that among the juniors of the diplomatic set eager inquiries were being made to learn if we were again to entertain in the Pan American Union Building. That settled the matter, and we repeated. At the first dinner there had been no

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